

Back from the Dead - Part II

J.J. Johnson - Posted: 03.31.00

Friday March 24, 2000 - 10:00 PT

Back home after my "restful" stay at Hotel Purgatory.

Breaking the promise I'd made to "take it easy," and deciding to risk landing myself on an infirmity slab, I sit down again in front yonder computer, and get back to work at the SierraTimes.com. Even though I'm thinking that everything in my body had supposedly checked out fine, there's still something bothering me. I just couldn't put my finger on it. I only know that whatever had been going on with old ticker, it gets worse whenever I sit down in front of the computer.

There was a reason for this, which I will explain later. But after putting myself and the missus through the kind of melodrama that had taken place earlier last week, macho men like me don't dare saying anything to the wife about it, nor do we feel like mentioning it to Dr. B, who had promised he would call later for a follow up appointment - after a quick review of my medical records.

That's right. By this time, after all that had gone on, in my simple mind, I had decided that death was definitely less torture than reporting a problem that might have averted it. Besides, the Doc had said I was fine, so matter what was really going on inside, I had a genuine doctor's excuse not for doing anything about it.

It's important to remember that Dr B is NOT Dr A. Doc A, when he says, "We'll call you," means "after you've begun cardiac arrest." Doc B simply means "today," or "soon." And remember, he said that he'd call me after he reviewed my records.

Sure enough, the call came in at about 11:00hrs PT. It came from Dr B's secretary. Even before she called, I somehow knew from the way I was feeling that I wasn't going to walk away from this whole thing scott-free. There would be more doctor visits, more triple-digit prescriptions, and the constant demand of a complete life-style change "or you'll be dead in six months."

"Oh well, a guy could do a lot in six months," I rationalized.

It's important that you medical malpractice lawyers, M.D. wannabes and investigators pay close attention to the next paragraph. There will be a pop quiz on it later.

I didn't even want to take the call. When I answered the phone, this is what I heard: "Mr. Johnson, this is Doctors B's office. Doctor B says that after discussing your medical records with Doctor A, you will need to have an angiogram as soon as possible. There appears to be blockage in a least two of your arteries, and the right wall of your heart is not functioning properly. We have a bed waiting for you at Valley View Hospital in Las Vegas."

Most, if not all, past and present cardiac patients know what an angiogram is so there no need to go into graphic medical details. But I'll put that phone call in laymen's terms for everyone else. Here's what she was really saying:

"Mr. Johnson, Dr A. wanted to let you know that you've just swallowed a bomb that could go off at any second due to the slightest vibration - or from your just thinking about it. We have a bomb squad standing by, but if it looks like the bomb will go off, they just make sure they get out of the way."

And one more thing: They are not coming to me - I have to get there - 65 miles away. Good luck.

Within an hour, I wasn't sure whether I was to be on a plane to Phoenix, San Diego, Cleveland, or possibly even Washington, D.C. While I was slowly writing what I thought was my last will and testament to my fellow Ranch Hands - via e-mail, of course, my wife Nancy had her laptop and cell phone on "full throttle" looking for the best heart specialists in the country - and finding them. Most of the other surgeons told us they had complete faith in the medical profession in Las Vegas, and so should we.

Yeah, right.

Doc A called back to try to calm things down. "Don't worry, there's only a 20% chance of things going wrong, and only one chance of a fatality. But with your family's medical history, and the fact that you choose to eat and live like an American, that raises your chances. But never fear. We have a stable of medical hacks here just waiting to carve you open like a holiday turkey if anything goes wrong, or we don't like what we find. So hurry, hurry and get here fast."

How frightening is this?

Nancy packed everything in her preparation to be a long-term resident at Cardiology Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. She didn't know it, but I kept watching her to make sure she didn't pack anything in black. On the family side, my progressive - read: "liberal" - democratic nephew regularly spies this News Site so he will have political ammunition against me at those Thanksgiving dinners. (God love him!) Some of you know of whom I speak. For those who don't, names have been eliminated to protect the innocent.

Nephew caught the word on the SierraTimes front-page ticker up in Motor City. He then sent an immediate e-rocket over to his mom in the Windy City. She - my sister - immediately calls my father - frantic - while Dad's on the phone with me, trying to calm me down.

It wasn't a good day, folks.

So, as fate would have it, the imminent heart attack had to wait for the immediate anxiety attack to subside.

Nancy knew something was seriously wrong when I asked her to drive the 65 miles to get to Hotel Cardio. On the way out I just happened to take the nitroglycerin they had told me to hide in my wallet for just such emergencies, but it was not working. Light headed, the sweats, and a racing heart, and more chest pains - all gave me the signals that "I'd never see Las Vegas." Or maybe anywhere, anything or anyone else.

But of course, we men just can't worry the wives. We think they don't "do panic" well. Got news for you men - guys are WAY worse. I suggested just driving by the Pahrump Valley Medical Center on the way into Glitter Gulch. But this time I begged, "Nancy, please don't go in there screaming that I may be having a heart attack. Just let me have one in peace first, please?"

So that's where we stopped off first.

A quick blood pressure and heart check by the nurse told me (and the medical staff) that stopping by was a REAL good idea, especially after talking to Dr. B, who had reported what Dr. A had said about my heart condition. Decision: They would medicate things down to a low roar, and get a heli-ambulance to zip me over the mountain pass to Vegas. That way, they could watch my vital signs en route.

But as things always go in Pahrump, it took awhile to get the ball rolling. That gave Nancy time to race home and get some remaining items which she had left behind in a panic.

Murphy Law: Whatever can go wrong WILL go wrong.

It doesn't take long for medical resources to run thin in a small, but growing town of 33,000 people. All it takes in Pahrump, Nevada, is two car accidents in two different places with injuries.

And that's exactly what happened.

This sent the Pahrump medical resources to more pressing, bleeding issues, which changed the way and means for yours truly to be carted off to Vegas. All of this took place while Nancy was away from the Medical Center. But the good folks of Pahrump had a solution. Nancy found out what it was when she returned to see several men strapping me into my bed for the trip - men wearing wings on their uniforms.

Okay ladies here you go: You leave the hospital to pack a few things knowing that they will drive your sick husband to the hospital 65 miles away. When you left, they had told you that you had plenty of time, and that you could follow behind the ambulance in your car. Instead of this already stress-producing scenario, you return to see your husband being strapped in and wheeled out to the tarmac RIGHT NOW headed for the "Flight for Life" helicopter. Question: Do you, too, now feel like you're about to go into cardiac arrest?

It was the fastest (and loudest) trip I ever made to Vegas from Pahrump. Although all plans had been made prior to my arrival - I even knew what my room number was going to be - no one knew what to do once I actually got into Room #X from the roof of the Vegas Valley View Hospital.

This place is NOT St. Purgatory in the least. They know exactly what to do when a possible heart attack patient shows up in one of their wards. Simply send in the most important woman in the hospital - the Head Expert in charge of these life-threatening emergencies. Nurse Head Expert was the first person I saw after the pilots left. She came over, sat next to the bed, and immediately checked for the most vital sign of all -

"Mr. Johnson, how are you going to pay for this?"

After this, all the routine questions were asked, vital body-signs were checked again, followed by my body's being "assimilated" yet again into the high-tech medical infrastructure. Then came the more troubling questions.

Without going into the morbid details, I strongly suggest that everyone handle the matter of wills, Power of Attorney, organ donations, estate management, etc. BEFORE they find themselves hours away from possible death. It wasn't a pretty picture. Once Nancy arrived, we both had to discuss all of this. Neither of us had ever planned for things to roll down hill that fast. This was REAL, people. And it was happening NOW.

Both of us were afraid to even sleep. But one thing I knew was this: When God calls you home, you are never late. I spent the evening, and the next morning preparing to die.

Saturday March 25, 2000 - 11:30 PT

There I am again lying still, strapped to another cold metal hospital table just like the other one I had been strapped to. Again the wife is outside the room, helpless, and in tears. Again six men, draped from head to toe in light blue, surround me, all prepared to rip my chest open on command, just in case someone - me - sneezes or makes a wrong move. Again bright lights shine down on their backs and onto my face and body.

After being rushed again to a hospital - this time by whirly-bird - and wheeled into yet another

operating room, you'd think that I might have finally become almost comfortable with what's starting to look like a distinct possibility: That I may very shortly be meeting my Maker. I find myself thinking yet again: What a way to go.

One of the Men in Blue spoke first. It was Dr. B. "Just relax, J.J. Hopefully this won't take long."

Yes, please. Get it over quick. I hate waiting for the end of a bad movie. Where the anesthetic? Just let me sleep and not wake up to face eternal destiny.

The fun part started with another Man in Blue asking me a question. Remember, folks: I'm preparing to die right here and right now.

"So, Mr. Johnson - you publish a news web site, we hear - ?"

"Yes. SierraTimes.com"

"So, what kind of news do you folks cover?"

I gave him a general run-down, knowing full well they only trying to humor me. It did make me think of all the folks who made this site what it is. I was missing them already, as well as my tearful wife who was waiting outside. Then the first broadside hit me from another Man in Blue.

"Do you guys slam the Bureau of Land Management pretty good? I hate those bastards!"

"?! . Well...(I'm trying to be diplomatic) only when they deserve it. We also cover things like police shootings, second amendment issues, and."

"You mean like gangs?" He cut me off, and then continued while prepping me for the operation:
"There are three types of gangs in this town - the Crips, the Bloods, and Las Vegas Metro Police."

It was like a normal conversation to him. Then one of his sidekicks joined in:

"Those guys got nothing on those criminals in LA. That's why I moved here!"

Yes, ALL of this is a true story. These were doctors talking, very matter-of-factly, while they were prepping me for heaven knows what. All I could think of was that I was wishing I had a running tape recorder and my laptop. This is a STORY, I thought.

However, the Men in Blue were done with the chit-chat and were about to begin the real fun part.

Whoever said the way to a man's heart was through his stomach must have gotten an "F" in biology class. The route these boys took was the femoral artery. Don't ask me how it works, but these guys shoved some kind of line right up that artery to my heart. Then the whole show was up there on the TV screen.

Imagine, if you will, watching your heart working in real time on a TV monitor. That's what I was doing. They were looking for the problem.

And looking and looking. And looking.

They stopped. Everyone went quiet. Then they all looked at one another. Six Men in Blue who had been ready to rip my heart open - literally. I couldn't help anticipating the bad news. Dr. B removed his mask and said:

"Remember what I said about 'indigestion' in my office yesterday?"

"What?!?"

"Your heart's fine, Mr. Johnson. All systems are normal."

At first I didn't believe him. I insisted he tell Nancy immediately outside. He did so. Then he went right to a phone behind a large window. I couldn't hear him, but I saw him. If I were a betting man, I'd say he was on the phone with Dr.A, tearing him a new one.

Pop Quiz time: Why did all this happen? Let's review:

"Mr. Johnson, this is Doctors B's office. Doctor B says that, after discussing your medical records with Doctor A, you will need an angiogram as soon as possible. There appears to be blockage in a least two of your arteries and the right wall of your heart is not functioning properly. We have a bed waiting for you at Valley View Hospital in Las Vegas."

Here's the missing link: Dr B NEVER SAW THE REPORTS. He simply proceeded on good faith from what Dr A had said. Once EVERYONE reviewed the data that came in earlier that week, it was confirmed right there that I was fine, just under some stress, and that I had indigestion. I had been told this at least 4 times by 4 different medical personnel, but never by the infamous Dr A, who was too busy to stop and LOOK at the data which all the other medical technicians had seen - and tried to inform me about.

I and my entire family and many of my friends, all in several states, went through this - all of this - because of professional medical incompetence, and a huge, and very non-funny comedy of errors. The results: A busted groin from the angiogram, a HUGE medical bill, and nothing short of an obvious wake up call from God Almighty Himself.

Guess He and I should talk more often.

By 9:00pm that evening, after the dust had settled, Nancy and I were having dinner together in our home, with what I'd describe as a whole new outlook on life.

Sorry to keep you all here so long, but those who were concerned deserve to hear the whole story. Talk about news of the weird.

Thanks to all of you for your prayers. And a special thanks to all the Ranch Hands who kept Sierra Times operating during this nightmare. I owe you folks a lot. Thank you, Ranch hands for sticking together and coming together as a team. Truly, without you, there is no SierraTimes.com.